DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 820 CS 508 882

AUTHOR Howard, Heather A.

TITLE Communication Practices of Yesteryear: A Qualitative Analysis of Business and Professional Communication Textbooks in the Last Ten Years.

PUB DATE Nov 94

NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (80th, New Orleans, LA, November 19-22, 1994).

PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Business Communication; *Communication Skills; Higher Education; Qualitative Research; Student Needs; *Textbook Evaluation; Textbook Research; *Textbooks

IDENTIFIERS Teacher Surveys

ABSTRACT

In 1993, E. Perrigo and D. Gaut surveyed 222 business communication professors and received the names of textbooks that there instructors used. From the list, 10 were chosen and examined to discover what the authors deemed important knowledge for business students. Areas identified were: (1) the role or importance of communication in business settings; (2) communication viewed from the standpoint of the model; (3) writing ability; (4) specific types of written communication; (5) the difference between verbal and nonverbal communication; (6) listening skills; (7) the interviewing process and techniques; (8) resumes and letters of application; (9) group work; (10) multicultural/intercultural/international communication; (11) communication technology; (12) sex and gender bias; (13) conflict management; (14) public speaking and oral communication; (15) business and communication ethics. Communication skills can insure business students' success or failure perhaps more so than any other subject they have learned while earning their college degrees. Educators must insure that students become knowledgeable in the business and professional skills necessary to their career development. (Contains 12 references.) (TB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 381 820

Communication Practices of Yesteryear:

A Qualitative Analysis of Business & Professional Communication Textbooks in the Last Ten Years

Heather A. Howard

University of West Florida

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Heather Howard

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS508882

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Communication Practices of Yesteryear:
A Qualitative Analysis of Business & Professional Communication Textbooks in the Last Ten Years

Communication skills are essential in today's workforce. Treece indicates that communication will determine a business student's success maybe more so than any other skill or knowledge (1994, 2). As educators, we must ask ourselves if we are teaching specific topics in the course curriculum that are relevant to business. What do business students need to know about communication? The purpose of this paper is to conduct an analysis of the business and professional textbooks written in the last ten years that are currently being used by university professors. Topical areas that textbook authors consider essential for the business and professional communicator will be reviewed.

In 1993, Perrigo and Gaut surveyed 222 business communication professors and received the names of the textbooks that these instructors utilized in business communication courses in universities in the U.S. After discussion with four university professors who teach business and professional communication and after reviewing the textbook list from the survey, ten books from the survey list were chosen and examined to discover what the authors deemed important knowledge for business students. The ten books are as follows:

- *Communicating for Results* (Hamilton and Parker, 1993)
- *Business Communication Today* (Bovee and Thill, 1992)
- *Communicating in Business and the Professions: The Inside Word* (Staley and Staley, 1992)
- *Communicating at Work* (Adler, 1992)
- *The Business and Professional Communicator* (Neher and Waite, 1993)

- *Writing and Speaking in Business* (Vik, Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 1990)
- *Basic Business Communication* (Lesikar, 1991)
- *Successful Business Communication* (Treece, 1987)
- *Business Communications* (Himstreet, Baty and Lehman, 1993)
- *Strategic Communication in Business and the Professions* (O'Hair and Friedrich, 1992).

Fifteen subject areas were found to be consistently important to most of the aforementioned authors:

- the role or importance of communication in business settings,
- a communication model,
- writing ability,
- specific types of written communication,
- the difference in verbal and nonverbal communication,
- listening skills,
- the interviewing process and/or techniques,
- resumes and letters of application,
- group work,
- multicultural/intercultural/international communication,
- communication technology,
- sex or gender bias,
- conflict management or resolution,
- public speaking or oral communication and

- business and communication ethics.

Nine out of ten books began with a purpose for studying business communication--its role or importance for students in their future careers. Students are given examples or scenarios in which correct communication etiquette is imperative. Overall, the authors of the texts explain the dire importance of being able to express oneself effectively and efficiently in business settings and the consequences of such inability (failure or job loss). "The results of a survey of 1,000 personnel managers in the U. S. identified the top three skills for job performance as involving communication" (Adler, 4). Students are informed that correct communication can portray an overall competent image, and incorrect skills can lead to costly mistakes. They are taught that a majority of their work days are spent communicating, so the ability to communicate adequately in order to function productively during a majority of their careers is crucial.

Communication is a diverse and sometimes difficult field, and all of the authors began their textual information with a communication model. The model of preference was the sender/receiver model. Authors addressed the sending and receiving of communication messages and the barriers, noise, contexts, etc. that affected the receipt of these messages. Explanations are given about the components of these subjects and methods of avoiding pitfalls and assuring an accurate and complete message being delivered to and processed by the receiver.

It is imperative that students have the ability to deliver effective messages; therefore, oral communication and public speaking are essential skills for future business communicators to master. Unanimously, all the authors found oral communication and public speaking as worthwhile topics for business and professional communication books. Seventy percent of them specified informative and persuasive speeches, the differences between them and the content of

each. Ninety percent of the authors added visuals as a subtopic. Visuals were seen as effective tools for attracting attention and clarifying points.

Oral communication is essential to communicate, but seven of the observed authors also found written communication as an important skill. The ability to communicate in a written format was also considered essential for success in the business world. Sixty percent of the textbooks mentioned the importance of being clear and concise when producing written material, so that the communication process would be accurate and efficient. Besides the manner in which written messages should be constructed, the same seven authors included the specific types of written messages that students would encounter in future careers and even in their job search. Letters and memoranda were mentioned as two types of messages that students would experience in the business world. The books' topics included what letter or memo format and style, specific content and writing etiquette to remember when writing these messages. Good organization in written messages is also imperative (Thill and Bovee, 77).

Written messages that students utilize in their job search included resumes and letters of application, and collectively the ten authors found these messages necessary for students to understand. After establishing that the role of these tools in creating a good first impression and securing an interview and/or job is essential, the authors explained the specific contents of resumes and letters of application and the appropriateness of these messages. The books supplied examples of resumes and suggestions for headings and subheadings for distinct information to include under these headings. Material on the application letters included methods of organizing the letter to attract attention and market oneself. Half of the authors also included thank you letters for response to application letters and unsolicited letters of application.

Since students hope to secure an interview from written messages, all observed business and professional textbooks included topics on interviewing and the interviewing process. Details are given on proper dress and conduct and information an interviewee should know prior to the interview. Types of possible interview questions are discussed -- open/closed and primary/secondary (O'Hair and Friedrich, 220). Examples of typical interview questions both from the interviewer and interviewee perspective are outlined. Thill and Bovee include a chart called "Marks Against Applicants" which includes subjects like "has poor personal appearance, lacks tact and has limp, weak handshake" (322). The importance and seriousness of the interview are stressed.

A topic that is related to the interview and the job situation in general is verbal and nonverbal language, and ninety percent of the examined textbooks included information on this topical area. Verbal language is important because it allows you to communicate information to the receiver; this type of language is especially important in written messages. In oral communication, however, nonverbal language is also extremely important. Neher and Waite define nonverbal as "all intentional and unintentional means other than writing or speaking by which a person sends a message (14). Students are taught that facial expressions, distance relationships with their communication partner and even their eye behavior can affect the way messages are sent and received. Subjects such as kinesics (body movements, facial expressions, posture, etc.), proxemics (space between sender(s) and receiver(s)), paralanguage, touch and dress were also mentioned as important nonverbal cues (Staley and Staley, 414-421). The relationships between verbal and nonverbal cues are also considered significant. Correct verbal and nonverbal communication must be combined to effectively send and receive messages.

Another important skill that is needed for interviewing as well as working is the skill of listening. All ten authors included a section on listening. Listening is important to communication, and this importance as well as the reasons for its importance are expressed in business communication textbooks. Proper listening is imperative to receive the message that the sender initiates. The effectiveness of a person's listening skills can also effect how he/she is seen as an organizational communicator (Staley and Staley, 222). Listening helps insure accurate order-filling and ability to meet customer needs (Hamilton and Parker, 105). Listening aids employee relations by assisting a supervisor in identifying employee problems and needs. Listening skills also assist you in adapting to different small group dynamics and allow meetings to run more smoothly (Thill and Bovee, 527).

Group work and the skills needed to accomplish the group work were also subjects that are included in seven of the ten business and professional communication textbooks. Many of the tasks in the business world require interpersonal work and reliance on others, so the ability to work and communicate effectively with others is important. Since groups are merely "an assembly of people" and on-the-job tasks require people to work together, the word *team* might be more accurate (Adler, 211). Effective sizes for teams as well as their characteristics are described in the observed books. Knowledge of the advantages of teams -- more and better solutions, built-in buy-in power, social need satisfaction, etc. -- as well as disadvantages -- time eating, groupthink, conflict, etc. -- are also considered important for business students to know. Team members need to possess at least some of the following skills and attitudes: curiosity, independence, optimism, openness, self-confidence, persistence, commitment, flexibility, friendliness and cooperation (Staley and Staley, 319-324, 335).

Six of the authors incorporated conflict management and/or conflict resolution into their textbooks. Conflict management and/or conflict resolution is a topic that is closely related to teamwork. When different people with different personalities and personal goals are working together to accomplish a task, there is likely to be some sort of conflict. For this reason some of the aforementioned teamwork skills -- openness, flexibility, friendliness and cooperation -- are especially important. Students are supplied with different approaches to conflict -- avoiding, accommodating, competing, collaborating and compromising (Adler, 123-125). Conflict can be productive or destructive, and students are shown the difference. Also, Thill and Bovee advocate a strategy that teaches students a way for both parties involved in a conflict to win -- win-win strategy; using this method conflict is resolved in a more satisfying ways for both parties (513).

"Business is moving to create a global marketplace... Over 100,000 American companies do business abroad..." (Eisenburg and Goodall, 1993, 9). Globalization of the marketplace forces business people into multicultural and international communications. Ninety percent of the inspected textbooks entailed discussions of these kinds of communication. Culture is a set of behavior patterns that are characteristic of identifiable groups. These patterns encompass language, typical occupations, etc. (Neher and Waite, 106). Culture differs among nations and subgroups within the nations. So, when company representatives are sent abroad, they must be trained in the language and customs of the country they are visiting. Even nonverbal cues vary by country and culture (Hamilton and Parker, 153). Time, conduct, work attitudes, relationships, space and power all differ among nations (Vik, Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 506-511). In order to insure good relations and effective work processes for firms and institutions, business students must be aware of the proper way to communicate in their differing environments.

Another area that is becoming more essential in business is managing the differences in the sexes. All of the authors addressed this issue in some fashion. Seventy percent incorporated the importance of avoiding sexist language in communication settings, and fifty percent found gender differences play a role in communication. Earlier in this century, sexist language was common, but such language usages are now unacceptable (O'Hair and Friedrich, 153). Sexist language should be avoided and the primary ways to achieve non-sexist language are to shift to the plural, rephrase the sentence to eliminate third person pronoun, identify the individual involved and use gender-free terms (Vik, Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 49).

Sexual harassment, too, has become a problem in businesses. A 1986 survey found that seventy one percent of business and professional women report being sexually harassed on the job. Sexual harassment is "a negative form of interpersonal communication", the attention is unwelcome, and it creates "a so-called hostile or intimidating climate" (Neher and Waite, 143). "Effective communication requires trust and respect" (Hamilton and Parker, 193), and sexual harassment hinders such communication. Only twenty percent of all books surveyed addressed sexual harassment in detail by defining it and indicating a commission or legal act that prohibits it.

The prevalence of sexual harassment leads to a question of ethics in business and professional organizations. Seven out of ten of the authors mentioned ethics in some form in their textbooks. Ethics in writing, interviews, presentations, situations and negotiations are discussed. "Ethics refers to the principles of right and wrong that guide us in making decisions that affect others" (Himstreet, Baty and Lehman, 158). Fair reporting and accuracy are important to being ethical in writing (Lesikar, 138). Honesty in interviewing -- giving clear and detailed answers and correcting misunderstandings -- is essential to ethical conduct (Adler, 160). Truth in the

negotiation process (Neher and Waite, 425), loyalty to ideals (Staley and Staley, 268) in situational ethics and the avoidance of "manipulation, trickery, coercion or force" (Hamilton and Parker, 421) in presentations all are imperative to an individual or organization's ethical behavior.

The last topical area that was overwhelmingly included in business and professional textbooks was the technological innovations of communication -- communication technology. With the advent of desktop publishing, telecommunications and video communications, the methods of communication are changing. "The automated office...is increasingly common in today's organizational world" (Staley, 441). Videoconferencing cuts down on travel costs and allows more employees to participate (Treece, 35), E-mail is used for internal communication, and interactive video for training (Neher and Waite, 361). Technology has aided the office in the following ways:

- reduction of repetitive work,
- reduction of cost,
- increase in current reports with useful graphics,
- increase in time spent on creative work and
- possible decrease in layers of management (Vik, Wilkinson and Wilkinson, 530).

Students need to learn and adapt to the new advances in communication technology in order to adapt in the workforce of the 1990s.

In summary, the fifteen common subject areas that were identified in this paper are consistently found to be important to authors of the previously mentioned textbooks. The knowledge and ability to exhibit these skills make the competent business and professional communicator and are the subjects that professors teach in Business and Professional

Communication courses. While the authors of these textbooks approached the subjects differently and varied in the amounts and content of the information they provided, they supplied students with the skills they feel are imperative to students' job success.

To conclude, an analysis of ten business and professional textbooks (listed beforehand) currently used by university professors found common subject areas in the books. These aforementioned fifteen topical areas are subjects that the authors deem essential for the competent communicator in this field. Communication skills can insure business students' success or failure perhaps more so than any other subject they have learned while earning their college degrees. As educators, we must insure that students become knowledgeable prevalent in the necessary business and professional skills to make them enhance their career development.

References

Adler, R. B. (1992). *Communicating at work* (4th ed.). USA: McGraw-Hill.

Bovee, C. L., & Thill, J. V. (1992). *Business communication today* (3rd ed.). USA: McGraw-Hill.

Eisenberg, E. M., & Goodall, H. L. (1993). *Organizational communication: Balancing creativity and constraint*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Hamilton, C. with Parker, C. (1993). *Communicating for results: A guide for business and the professions* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Himstreet, W. C., Baty W. M., & Lehman, C. M. (1993). *Business communications*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lesikar, R. V. (1992). *Basic business communication* (5th ed.). Homewood, IL: Irwin.

Neher, W. W., & Waite, D. H. (1993). *The business and professional communicator*. USA: Allyn and Bacon.

O'Hair, D., & Friedrich, G. W. (1992). *Strategic communication in business and the professions*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Perrigo, E., & Gaut, D. (1994). (Business communication survey).

Staley, C. C., & Staley, R. S. (1992). *Communicating in business and the professions: The inside word*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Treece, M. (1987). *Successful business communication* (3rd ed.) . USA: Allyn and Bacon.

Vik, G. N., Wilkinson, C. W., & Wilkinson, D. C. (1990). *Writing and speaking in business* (10th ed.). Homewood, IL: Irwin.